One Hundred Years of Unitarianism in New Bedford

E. STANTON HODGIN

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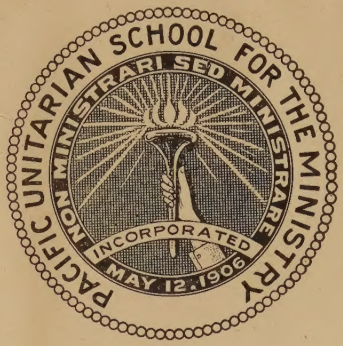

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One Hundred Years of Unitarianism in New Bedford, Massachusetts

BY

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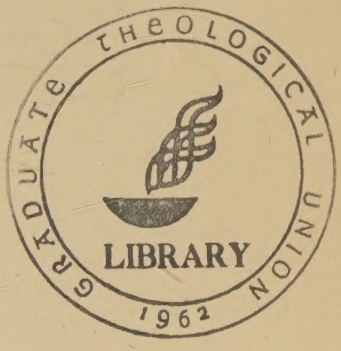
MINISTER, FIRST CONGREGATIONAL SOCIETY



PRINTED FOR THE SOCIETY

BY THE VINING PRESS, NEW BEDFORD, MASS.

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RELIGIOUS CONDITIONS IN NEW BEDFORD ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO — 1823.

If a stranger had come to New Bedford one hundred years ago to study religious conditions here, he would have found a thriving town of about six thousand people with seven places of public worship. This society then occupied a dignified wooden meetinghouse at the corner of Purchase and William Streets, where the Merchants National Bank now stands. The North Congregational Church was in a frame building of a similar character on the site of their stone structure of today. The members of the Christian denomination would have been found at their present location on Middle Street. The Baptists were at the corner of School and Second Streets in a large square wooden building that still stands, having been converted into an apartment house long ago. Judging by the number of persons usually seen on the streets in that vicinity, one would be justified in concluding that enough people occupy that house today to make a good sized congregation,—enough children at least for a fair sized Sunday School. A little group of Methodists were worshiping in a small building at the corner of Acushnet Avenue and Elm Street. This building as subsequently enlarged still occupies the same site, having been converted to business uses. Another small group might have been found in a tiny chapel that had just been erected on Allen Street near Dartmouth road. This little company comprised the entire Roman Catholic population of the whole community. Verily have "the little ones become a multitude"! The largest and most influential group of worshipers would have been found in the new brick meetinghouse that had just been completed by the Friends at Spring and Sixth Streets, where they still assemble. Their old meetinghouse, which they had outgrown and deserted, the first structure for public worship erected in the City of New Bedford (1785), still stands at the corner of Seventh and Spring Streets.

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One hundred years ago, this community was entering upon a period of marked prosperity. The whaling and shipping industry had become well established in New Bedford long before, but the Revolutionary War put it entirely out of business for a decade, and the period succeeding Independence was one of extremely hard times. It was well on the road to recovery when the embargo and the second war with Great Britain caused a complete suspension of activity once more. By the year 1823, one hundred years ago, it was again well on the road to recovery and was entering upon its longest and greatest period of expansion and prosperity. The ship owners and traders were becoming men of importance and many fine residences and estates were being established on County Street and other choice locations.

We frequently hear it said that the gap between the economic conditions of the employer and employee is growing steadily wider from generation to generation, and that the daily wage earner is relatively worse off today than he was in the good old days. I find a few interesting side lights in the old parish records on the conditions of the wage earners one hundred years ago. About the beginning of the nineteenth century, it is recorded that this society entered into a solemn contract with a certain man to act as sexton, for which services the society agreed to pay him the sum of six dollars a year. A few years later it is recorded that the sexton's pay shall be increased to eight dollars a year on account of a few more pews being added, and later when the gallery was completed the pay was still further increased to twelve dollars. Just one hundred years ago the meetinghouse was cut in two in the middle and drawn out and made at least a third larger, and stoves were put in to heat it for the first time. On account of the increased labor involved in these changes, the sexton's salary was boosted to the munificent sum of twenty-five dollars per year. Because they were to pay him so large a sum, his duties were made very specific in the records. He was to ring the bell for all meetings held in the meetinghouse; he was to saw, split and store all the wood

used in heating the building; he was to build the fires and maintain them whenever meetings were held during the winter season; he was to keep cleaned, "wicked" and filled the lamps used for lighting the building and was to light them whenever needed; he was to sweep the house and keep it clean for all occasions; and he was to serve as a sort of major domo and see to it that "no boys or other persons were guilty of any rough or unseemly conduct" either in the meetinghouse or on the grounds surrounding it. Judging by the number of pews, the meetinghouse must have had about the same capacity as this one; it surely was as much work to saw, split and carry the wood and keep fires in the stoves as it is today to shovel coal into the furnace: it surely was as much work to keep the lamps filled, "wicked", trimmed and burning as it is today to turn the electric switch; and when there were no pavements and very few sidewalks, the people would surely carry as much dirt into the house as they do in these days of clean and tidy streets. The fact that janitors receive several times as much per month today as they did per year a century ago is some indication of the improved conditions of labor. If we compare the difference in the conditions of living of the men who owned the ships one hundred years ago and the men who worked for them in the forecastle, with the difference between the conditions of living of the men who own the mills today and the men and women who work for them we shall see that the average wage earner has every reason to be thankful that he is living today rather than in the good old days. The fact that so much has been achieved in improving the economic conditions of all during the past century encourages us to believe that still greater improvement will be made in the next century.

Daniel Ricketson in his "New Bedford of the Past" concentrates his reminiscences upon the year 1822, and Joseph Anthony's diary, recently published in the *Mercury,* which throws such a flood of light upon the daily life and happenings of his time, was written just a century ago. We thus have a more intimate knowledge of what was occupying the

minds of the people then than we have of almost any other period in New Bedford history.

The winter of 1823 and 1824 was a momentous one in the life of this church; so far as results were concerned probably the most significant in the whole two centuries of its existence. It was at this time that it assumed its present name of "The First Congregational Society in New Bedford." The covenant of church membership was simplified and broadened; people were encouraged to become members of the society without any theological declaration whatsoever, whether they could accept the covenant of church membership or not. This policy was followed to such an extent that the church gradually disappeared leaving the society supreme without any religious test whatsoever being required of anyone. The really momentous event for which these changes prepared the way, was the coincidence of the settling of Dr. Orville Dewey as minister of this society with the culmination of the bitter controversy and separation that took place in the Society of Friends at that time. An equally bitter controversy among the Congregationalists had resulted a few years before in a separation and the establishment of the North Congregational Church. These separations eventuating in the coalescing of the liberal elements of each in this society under the leadership of Dr. Dewey fills so large a place in the religious conditions of one hundred years ago that it is necessary to enlarge upon it somewhat at this time.

The division in the Congregational ranks of New England one hundred years ago is usually referred to as the "Unitarian Division" and was due to the rise and spread of Unitarian convictions in many of the older churches of New England. In New Bedford, however, the division had taken place before the Unitarian convictions had become self-conscious, and was due primarily to an intense revival of militant Calvinism at that time, not unlike the wave of Fundamentalism that is sweeping through the Evangelical churches today and threatening disruption in many places.

The more liberal element, which constituted a majority of the parish and a minority in the church, was the passive element. The liberals were not conscious at the time of the separation of any particular change of faith or belief. Their chief desire was that affairs should continue much as they had been in the parish for two generations. Dr. Samuel West, who had been the minister for nearly half a century, was what would be called a latitudinarian in theology,—he did not stress theological differences and distinctions. He was an intense patriot and a mighty influence during the Revolutionary War and the events following. Historians give him credit for persuading his intimate friend John Hancock to cast his vote and influence on the side of the adoption of the Federal Constitution, when it was hanging in the balance. He carried his love of liberty over into his religious beliefs and teachings. The harsher doctrines of Calvinism became repellent to him, but he ignored them for the most part rather than trying to controvert them. This broad spirit of love and unity unconsciously became the temper of the entire parish. But after the death of Dr. West in 1807, there soon sprang up what can be called nothing less than a furious revival of militant Calvinism which took possession of a very active minority of the parish. These enthusiasts were so impatient to have their gospel preached without delay, that when they discovered they were not numerous enough to settle a minister of their own way of thinking, instead of waiting and trying to convert the parish to their views they immediately established a church of their own and called the man of their choice to be their minister. Notwithstanding the fact that they had set up an independent church to which they gave their support, they still claimed a voice in the management of affairs in the old parish as is shown by the fact that they protested against the settlement of Ephraim Randall, an avowed liberal, in the mother church four years later, in 1814. The protest was of course ignored.

It was not until after the withdrawal of this intense and aggressive Calvinistic group, that the liberalism, which had

prevailed in the parish for so long under the leadership of Dr. West, ripened into a self-conscious Unitarianism. The liberal majority then soon found themselves in complete sympathy with the preaching and teaching of men like William Ellery Channing, who were the leaders of the new gospel that was differentiating itself from the old at this time.

The Unitarian gospel has never remained stationary but has been in a constant state of evolution or development. The Unitarian theology that was preached one hundred years ago would sound very strange and orthodox today if it should be heard from this pulpit. The fine liberal spirit which characterized the leaders of our movement in those days remains, we hope, while the theology changes and must ever continue to change to meet the need of the new heaven and the new earth that science and research reveal to us.

The divisions in the Society of Friends which culminated in New Bedford one hundred years ago are most interesting and enlightening. Although many of the Quaker historians will disagree with me, I have always regarded the eighteenth century as the golden age of Quakerism, the century in which it really came to its finest fruitage, when it filled a place, especially in America, that no other religious organization even attempted to fill. Did you ever notice how many thousands of volumes are written on the religious controversies of the seventeenth century, and how very few are written on those of the eighteenth? Modern church historians usually pass rapidly over from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. The seventeenth century was a period of intense religious activity and agitation in which religious questions were in the forefront everywhere. People fought, bled and died for their religion by the hundreds of thousands. This period of extreme religious tension was followed in the eighteenth century by a period of extreme spiritual lassitude. It was a century of religious indifference and ecclesiastical selfishness. While there were many remarkable exceptions, the clergy the world over during the eighteenth century were a poor lot. They were ignorant, slothful and often

immoral. They were anything but true religious leaders. In many countries the church simply ran on by its momentum, because it was a means of livelihood to many people who used it as a means of extortion, preying upon the superstitions of the people. This was less true of New England than of almost any other portion of the world. It was far more true of the other American colonies as well as the whole of Europe. In many parts of America, the Quaker preacher, traveling from settlement to settlement, was the one spiritual voice in a wilderness of gross indifference. The Friends' meetinghouse in the country was often the one oasis that gathered the people of all faiths and no faith to itself and gave them at least a few crumbs of spiritual nourishment.

Professor Leonard Bacon of Yale University, who is not in the least inclined to be partial to the Friends, says in substance that the Quakers were the one religious body that had at least the framework of an organization that was conterminous with the entire territory. While they dominated only in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, they were present in virtually every English speaking community in America, even though not numerous. In speaking of religious conditions in the South, he declares that while the great majority of the people were nominally of the Church of England, the established church during the colonial period was for the most part a whited sepulcher without vitality and without activity. While the actual enrolled membership of the Friends in the South was less than one-seventh of the population, the real church of the people was the Quaker meeting and it was to hear the traveling preacher, who made his way over the vast distances from settlement to settlement on foot or on horseback, that all the country people came together, and from him they received almost their only vital message.

The same thing was true in this portion of New England to no small extent. The country was apparently dotted with Friends' meetinghouses from Cape Cod to the Connecticut border. There were at one time at least fourteen Friends' meetings within the borders of the old township of Dart-

mouth. These were ethical and social centers whose influence extended far beyond that of their own members. They were true to their name. They were "friendly" and cultivated the social life in simple ways that we can scarcely understand today. When they had their Quarterly meetings, or when visiting ministers were present, virtually all the country people from great distances would assemble. Mr. Ellis in his history of New Bedford speaks of such a gathering at the Apponegansett meetinghouse in 1766 at which over two thousand people were present, not half of whom could gain entrance.

They were not very doctrinal in their preaching in those early days. They felt that there was something in every person that would respond to life and love, and the awakening of the slumbering conscience or soul of man to his responsibilities and possibilities was their purpose. There was little disposition to try to separate the sheep from the goats. In the early part of the eighteenth century they had no definite basis of membership, but counted all "members" who formed the habit of meeting with them, and all children became members by "birthright." Later there grew up a rigid system of membership and they became in some ways most exclusive.

The nineteenth century ushered in the period of controversy which ran its ruthless ploughshare through the entire denomination and left it in fragments. There were three distinct tendencies that were a long time in differentiating themselves from each other. In the first place there were the rigid disciplinarians; those who made "Discipline" their deity, who were bent on excising everyone who did not conform to the letter of the "Discipline" to the last detail. Joseph Anthony in his diary speaks of "Obediah and Job" (he does not give their family names) as the two worst "butchers" in the local society; their one apparent purpose in life was the slaughter of the innocent, the disowning of everyone who deviated a hairsbreadth from the straight and narrow way in dress or address. This passion for disownment which at times infected the entire denomination was the most striking paradox to their otherwise friendly and tolerant disposition.

Another distinct tendency was toward the views and practices of the prevailing evangelical bodies with which they came into contact; a tendency to lay ever increasing stress upon theological beliefs, and the use of Scripture as a final authority.

The third tendency was toward giving a more rational interpretation to religion and life; to approach constantly nearer the position of the Unitarians of that time.

The final result of these controversies was the splitting of the denomination of Friends into three distinct bodies; the disciplinarian group and the orthodox group holding together until the liberals had either withdrawn or been cast out. Affairs came to a crisis in the Friends' Society here in New Bedford earlier than it did elsewhere, just as it had come a little earlier in the Congregational Society here than it did in many of the other New England communities.

After they had reduced some of the liberal elders to the ranks, as it were, had withdrawn from them the right to sit in the "Select Meeting" and participate in its affairs, which was about as humiliating a procedure as could be inflicted upon anyone, and after they had disowned several prominent members and were proceeding to discipline others, it became apparent that the diverse elements could no longer dwell together in love and unity, so the liberal element, being in the minority, withdrew. They held a few meetings of their own at first, but instead of organizing themselves into a separate body, as was done in nearly all other communities of Friends, they came into this society, receiving a very cordial welcome from Dr. Dewey and the members of his congregation. It was in this way that a goodly number of the more influential families of New Bedford transferred their allegiance from the Society of Friends to this society just one hundred years ago. This controversy was at its height at the time that Joseph Anthony was writing his diary and as he was a regular attendant at the Friends' meeting he gives us a vivid picture of the unfriendly squabbles that occurred from week to week. Mr. Anthony did not wait for the withdrawal of the other liberals, but took a

pew in Dr. Dewey's church as soon as he was settled here, stating in his diary that he hoped a better spirit might eventually prevail in the Friends' Society so that he could return to his first love.

Dr. Dewey was one of the truly great men of his time. It is highly improbable that any one of lesser gifts of heart and mind could have satisfied these liberal Friends and have made them feel at home in a church whose traditions and practices were so different from those to which they were accustomed. If the members of this society had not persevered and made the extraordinary effort that they did to secure Dr. Dewey, in all probability, these liberal Friends would have formed a permanent organization of their own.

In Dr. Dewey the liberal gospel had found a commanding voice, and I shall speak next Sunday morning of his life and services.

DR. ORVILLE DEWEY: A MASTER MIND: THE LIBERAL GOSPEL FINDS A COMMANDING VOICE.

"Well done, good and faithful servant."

Between the retirement of Dr. West in 1803 and the coming of Dr. Dewey in 1823 was a hiatus of twenty years. This was a period of controversy, secession and uncertainty, in which the old parish was finding itself. It gradually became conscious of its complete sympathy with the Unitarian gospel that was slowly differentiating itself from the orthodoxy of the time, and which was being preached in so many of the leading pulpits of New England. The parish was without a settled minister much of this time, and those who did serve for short pastorates apparently made little impression upon the community. After two decades of halting uncertainty, the parish committee determined to bring to New Bedford a minister who was the peer of any to be found in the land, and, having decided that Dr. Dewey was the man, left no stone unturned to induce him to cast in his lot with them. They not only offered him what was then considered a very adequate salary, but offered him a bonus of three thousand dollars outright. They enlarged and completely remodeled the old meetinghouse, and built him a sightly home at 199 Orchard Street. The building, now being demolished, was an imposing structure occupying one of the most sightly locations in the city, having an unobstructed view of the entire harbor. The never ending stream of incoming and outgoing vessels was the life of the city and was a constant source of interest, for not only the news of the world but the commodities on which they were dependent were brought in by those white winged messengers. Speaking of this house many years after, Dr. Dewey said: "My study had the loveliest outlook upon Buzzard's Bay and the Elizabeth Islands,—I shall never have such a study again. Oh, the joy of that sea view! When I came to it again after a vacation's absence, it moved me like the sight of an old friend."

Dr. Dewey fulfilled all expectations. New Bedford soon recognized him as a master mind and a great personality. His power was the very opposite in kind from that of Rev. Sylvester Holmes, the minister of the Calvinistic branch of the Congregational church, who had gained a large following, and whom Mr. Potter speaks of as "a man of tremendous energy, of indomitable will, of narrow but vigorous intellect, a forcible preacher, a great ecclesiastical organizer, and a veritable firebrand of theological agitation." Dr. Dewey's strength was the strength of calmness and dignity. His message was invigorating and life giving because the currents of his life ran so clear and so deep.

He speaks frequently in his autobiography of the delightfulness of his life in New Bedford and of his wonderful fellowship with the people of the parish. The old church building was soon well filled at both services and in his later life he could seldom speak of New Bedford without a sigh of regret. Nothing would have pleased him better than to remain here permanently. One thing, however, forbade, and that was the tragedy of his life,—his ill health. He could not prepare two sermons a week. If he could have been content to prepare his sermons as most preachers do, all would have been well, for he had an abundance of knowledge and erudition he could have readily passed on to others; but no, he could preach nothing he himself had not experienced. Every sermon was a tragic testing of his own life; every utterance that came from his lips must pass through the furnace of his own soul and be fused at white heat, and he soon burned himself out and was completely prostrated.

When a man delivers a great address, or performs an exceptional piece of labor in a masterful way, people marvel at the ease with which it is done. They assume that he moves through his tasks as one of the planets moves in its orbit, because it cannot help it; it seems to do itself. I presume many people felt that way when they listened to Dr. Dewey,

and were moved to the depths of their being, in view of the apparent calmness and ease with which his work was done. They little realized the price he paid for his power.

By far the greater number of preachers and writers, and many of the most popular and successful ones, are clever compilers. They read and study and gather material and then put it together attractively in virtually the same condition as it comes to them. But there is an occasional preacher and writer of a different character. No matter how much material comes to him through reading, study, observation and association, it all passes through the chemistry of his own soul and is transfused in the process. Most of our minds seem to be made up principally of pigeon holes in which facts and experiences are stored away and brought out unchanged as occasions call for them. Some of our minds do not seem to be even pigeonholed. Such knowledge as we have is thrown into a general scrap heap and lies there unorganized. When anything is required of us we paw it over and if anything at all suitable to the occasion is brought to light we are fortunate. There are minds, however, that are like a chemical laboratory. Whatever comes to them is transfused and comes forth as a distinct personal product, vibrant with life. We all have this power of mental assimilation to some slight extent at least; but occasionally men have it to a very marked degree, and Dr. Dewey was one of these.

This power of mental assimilation was no doubt greatly enhanced by what most people would regard as a great misfortune that came to him in the days of his youth. He speaks in one place in his autobiography of his college days as the time when he "lost his sight and gained insight." As the result of indiscretion when he had the measles, he was almost entirely deprived of the use of his eyes during the years of his college and theological studies. His fellow students read to him some, he listened closely to the lessons and lectures, but he spent several hours each day in rigorous thought, in trying

to think out for himself all the questions involved in his work. The result was that he graduated from Williams College in 1814 with first honors.

This power of concentration, the will to think things through, is the hardest work one can undertake. The average person will undergo any amount of strenuous activity and will endure almost any hardship if he can only be spared the necessity of rigorous thought. The human race is lazier and more shiftless about exercising its mental muscle than it is in any other respect. We will work harder in our efforts to find a substitute for a little severe and honest thinking than we will for anything else.

Dr. Dewey early schooled himself in the processes of rigorous and active thinking, and he carried it so far that he wore out the organism and almost wrecked his life. His mind was not simply an intellectual machine by any means. His emotions were as deep and as intense as his thoughts. He felt everything that he thought; he went through all the emotional experiences that his comprehensive thinking led to. He writes to an intimate friend of sitting at his desk writing with "burning brain and bursting tears." He burned himself out emotionally as truly as he did intellectually. After his Sunday services he was often completely prostrated and his body was as lame and as helpless as if he had been beaten with rods. It was frequently the middle of the week before he could be up and around again. Yet so complete was his self-control that he was the personification of calm dignity, and few suspected the intensity of the fires that were glowing underneath. The one complaint he makes about New Bedford is its isolation, and the difficulty of having frequent exchanges, for it was a long way over the sandy roads of those days to Taunton and Providence, where his nearest ministerial neighbors resided.

After ten years of joyous agony here, loving his work and loving his people as few have the capacity to love, writing his sermons with his very heart's blood, he communicates to a

friend, with almost the pathos of a broken heart, that he must give up his work in New Bedford, that he has preached every sermon that is fit to preach five times, and he can face that congregation no longer. His wonderful ministry here thus came to an end, but the church had been established on as firm a foundation as the granite rock beneath the hills, and there was no question after that as to what it stood for in the community.

Few sermons will bear repeating to the same congregation five times. And yet if one could produce a real masterpiece, why should it not be repeated almost indefinitely? A real poem grows in power and meaning by being constantly repeated. We do not throw away our hymn book and our service book as soon as we have gone through them once. It is only by continual use that we get the message. A sermon of the first order might very well be repeated at least twice a year and grow in power indefinitely. But how many of us are conscious of ever having produced a sermon of the first order? Most of us are so painfully aware of the purely transient character of our preaching, that we shrink from repeating even once during a long pastorate. I am of the opinion that most of Dr. Dewey's sermons were so vital to the time, that they would bear repeating more than five times in ten years. I doubt if any of the members of his congregation were conscious that his preaching was growing stale, or of any waning power on his part. If he could only have retained his faith in himself and in his old sermons, he might have written a new sermon or two a month and gone on repeating his old ones indefinitely; though such a régime as that would be fatal in any person of less capacity than Dr. Dewey.

In one sense we do nothing else but repeat our sermons. The human race has produced scarcely more than half a dozen sermons,—not over ten at the outside. The essence of all the theology of the world can be put into two sermons, and short ones at that. The appeal to righteousness may be made to cover four or five sermons, and the modern revelations of science may furnish materials for a few more, but ten ser-

mons would surely cover everything. All the countless deluge of sermons that has been poured forth since the beginning of time are but repetitions, with countless variations and illustrations of these few possible sermons. The genius of preaching consists in the ability to ring the changes on these few possibilities in such a manner as to make them carry a fresh message every time.

At the close of his ministry here, Dr. Dewey spent a year in European travel in an effort to regain his health. On his return he published two volumes on his travels, called "The Old World and the New." I have dipped into them here and there, and Mrs. Hodgin has read them carefully. We are surprised to find them so interesting and lively. He was a keen observer, and he meditates and moralizes strikingly upon everything that he sees. Those who have recently traveled in Europe will find his descriptions of the way life appeared to one of his capacity one hundred years ago, the lessons he draws and the prophecies he makes, an excellent preface to their guide books. His style is not at all dull or heavy, but in many places has much of the raciness of modern journalism, as the following extract illustrates.

"I wonder that nobody has talked, or written, or sung, or satirized about this horrible discomfort of a sea voyage. It is said that Cato repented only of three things during his life—'to have gone by sea when he could go by land, to have passed a day inactive, and to have told a secret to his wife.' I will not discuss the other points with the old stoic, but with the first I certainly have the most perfect sympathy. It is not seasickness; I have none of it; but it is a sickness of the sea, which has never, that I know, been described. It is a tremendous ennui, a complete inaptitude to all enjoyment, a total inability to be pleased with anything. Nothing is agreeable—neither eating nor drinking, nor walking nor talking, nor reading nor writing, nor even is going to sleep an agreeable process, and waking is perfect misery."

Orville Dewey was born and spent his early years in the little town of Sheffield in the western part of this state. His

mother was very orthodox; his father was a liberal who had little use for conventional religion but was an upright and honorable man. He had an uncle of whom he was very fond who was always called an infidel, who while he accepted none of the tenets of orthodox Christianity was not a scoffer, and was a man of exceptional ability and of sterling character. Young Dewey was thus early subjected to various influences within the confines of his own family. While a student at Williams College he experienced conversion, but instead of this making him bigoted and narrow as it sometimes does, it filled him with a great yearning sympathetic love for all people and with a desire to bring them to experience the great strength and comfort which his sense of companionship with God brought him.

While still in college, doubts began to steal into his mind concerning the foundations of the religious faith which had for a time made him so happy. When he determined to prepare for the ministry, he decided to go to Andover Seminary, feeling sure that the arguments of the learned professors there would soon quiet his doubts, as Andover had been founded but a short time before for the avowed purpose of counteracting the heretical influences of Harvard. To his consternation, his studies at Andover instead of allaying his doubts only increased them. Not being able to read much on account of the weakness of his eyes, he had much time for thinking, but his logical thinking did not bring him to the conclusions at which John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards had arrived. He finished his course in a very unsettled state of mind and reluctantly accepted a call to an orthodox church in Gloucester, but after a few months preaching he was summoned by the New York Presbytery, which had licensed him to preach, to answer the charge of heresy. He decided to fight his doubts no more, but to follow gladly wherever what appealed to him as the best evidence might lead him, and his theological struggles were over for the remainder of his long life. His exceptional abilities must have been apparent at once for he was soon called to be the associate of Dr. Channing in

the Federal Street Church, Boston, the leading pulpit in the city at that time, and two years later he yielded to the persuasions of the parish committee of this church to settle in New Bedford.

In his autobiography, written in the latter days of his life, he recalls a few of those who impressed themselves upon him most indelibly while here. First of all was "Aunt Mary" Rotch. She was one of the elders in the Society of Friends that had been deposed on account of her liberal views. Eliza Rotch was another choice spirit. He refers to her as the most remarkable hearer he ever had in all his audiences. It was undoubtedly the influence of the Rotches, and their profound respect and admiration for Dr. Dewey, that caused the liberal element that left the Friends' Society to come to this church instead of establishing one of its own. He refers to Charles H. Warren as the prince of humorists, the man possessed of the most remarkable power of entertainment in conversation of anyone he ever knew. He alludes to Manasseh Kempton as a man of massive character who never quite mastered himself and thus did not gain the place of recognition he deserved. The unshakable integrity and the boundless hospitality of James Arnold was never forgotten.

On his return from Europe, finding that it was impossible for him to resume his work in New Bedford, he retired to his old home in Sheffield, feeling that quite possibly his active life in the ministry was over. But not so. The Second Unitarian Church in New York City had extended a call to him four years after his settlement here. He declined it at the earnest request of this parish. After his retirement from this church, seven years later, the call was renewed. It was at first declined again as he felt himself unequal to the task; but when they asked him to preach for them temporarily as they were without a pastor, although he knew he could not write sermons in the condition he was in, he concluded he would try some of his old sermons, "with their five New Bedford earmarks," upon a new congregation. The few weeks stretched out to an entire year, and he had improved so

much that he yielded to their solicitations and was settled as their pastor. This pastorate lasted in all thirteen years, counting the two years absence for rest and recuperation in Europe he was obliged to take in the middle of the term. It was a repetition on a larger scale of his New Bedford experience,—a commingling of great joy and great suffering. It was a very successful pastorate from the point of view of the church. He found it a small society in a small building in an obscure location. He left it a large society in a fine building at one of the best locations. He drew to this church many of the strongest and most influential men and women in the city and gave the church a standing that it long maintained.

He was never able to accept another church, though he served one of the Boston churches for an interim of a year or two. In his retirement he spent three years preparing a course of twelve lectures for the Lowell Institute on "The Problem of Human Destiny." They were heard with great interest in Boston, and were repeated with marked success in all the leading cities of America.

He lived to the good old age of eighty-eight years. The last twenty years were spent at his old home in Sheffield where he was born; as his biographer says, "watching with deepest interest the world from which he was withdrawn, sending out now and then words of warning and encouragement from his retirement, occupied with his little farm, with books and with meditations upon the loftiest themes of human thought, which had always made the joy and business of his mind."

Dr. Henry Bellows, closely associated with him in New York, said: "Dr. Dewey's nature was characterized from early youth by a union of massive intellectual power with an almost feminine sensibility; a poetic imagination with a rare dramatic faculty of representation. Diligent as a scholar, a careful thinker, accustomed to test his own impressions by patient meditation, a reasoner of the most cautious kind, capable of holding doubtful conclusions in suspense, devout and reverent by nature, he had every qualification for a great preacher in a time when the old foundations were being

broken up and men's minds were demanding guidance and support in the critical transition from the days of pure authority to the days of personal conviction by rational evidence; and no exaltation that the Church of the Messiah will ever attain can in any probability equal that which will always be given to it as the seat of Dr. Dewey's thirteen years' ministry in the city of New York."

Dr. Dewey's life was a happy and triumphant one, notwithstanding it was a life of pain and disappointment and defeat. His life was a success under handicaps that would have wrecked most lives because he gladly and willingly paid without complaint the price demanded.

THE NEW CHURCH — EPHRAIM PEABODY, THE BELOVED PASTOR.

The meetinghouse was dedicated May 23, 1838. Dr. Ephraim Peabody and Rev. John H. Morrison were installed joint ministers, May 24, 1838.

"Now the fruits of the spirit are these, love, joy, peace, meekness, temperance, self-control."

The pastorate of Dr. Ephraim Peabody in this church was coincident with the flood tide of the whaling industry in New Bedford. The year 1845, which marks the departure of Dr. Peabody to King's Chapel, Boston, was the year of greatest production,—nearly half a million barrels of oil and over three million pounds of whalebone—though the business continued to expand in capitalization, tonnage, ships, and number of men employed for more than a decade longer. At that time, New Bedford was surpassed only by New York, Boston and New Orleans in the number of ships bearing her name upon the high seas, and those ships were more widely scattered over the surface of the earth than those of any other port. It is quite possible that there were more men in New Bedford at that time who had a wider knowledge of the four quarters of the earth than could be found in any other place.

The bigness of the field of action, the unlimited variety of experience it offered and the hazardous character of the calling, instilled into the men and the women of the time an audacity of faith that was unique. That daring faith found material expression in our society through the erection of this church edifice. Anyone looking at this building today would know that it was not built for one generation or for two, or three or four, but for all time. No other building in the city gives such an impression of permanence. There are others whose walls are as massive, but the buttresses and towers give this a greater air of strength and immovability. No society in New Bedford would be likely to erect a structure of this character today. They might build larger and more elaborate

buildings but they would hardly follow the lines of this building, every one of which seems to forbid any thought of its ever being removed. I think we can rest assured that it will not be removed while this city continues, for even if Union and County Streets should become the business center, as Mr. Potter freely predicted it would, this building will have become so vital a part of the sentiment and life of the community that it will be preserved and cherished throughout all the changes of the future, however much greater those changes may be than we are capable of dreaming of today. It is for us to make the intangible influence that emanates from it as worthy of survival as the tangible body that houses it.

Like Rome, this church was not built in a day. According to the records, a decision to build was reached as early as 1833, though the actual building did not begin until 1836, and was not completed until 1838. I fancy there was not a little rivalry between the two Congregational churches, offspring of the same parent society, that occupied the same block on Purchase Street at that time. Apparently this society was first in determining to rebuild in enduring stone, but was very deliberate; the other formulated plans and brought them to fruition much more rapidly and the stone church at the corner of Elm and Purchase Streets is the result.

We are all glad that our ancestors took plenty of time; that they did not rebuild at the old location as they at first intended, but chose a more sightly corner, and that they selected a style of architecture that can never become out of date, but is bound to become increasingly appealing with every passing generation. As long as people meet together for aspiration, this type of building will be most fitting, and a building of the right character does gather something that is of intangible but of inestimable value with the passing generations.

The permanent and changeless character of this church building should typify the one permanent and changeless element in our religion. In this respect the Unitarian church has been a pioneer and has in the past stood almost alone

among all the forms of organized religion, though many of them are slowly and reluctantly drawing nearer to our point of view in their emphasis. Virtually every religious organization that has ever come into being has striven to perpetuate or make permanent some form of belief, some rite or mode of worship, some institution or the beliefs of some personality. We know that all those things are necessarily transient and must change as life changes; and the reason religious organizations and institutions are forever becoming institutions of tyranny instead of institutions of liberty is because they are forever trying to make permanent that which is in the nature of things transient.

The one basis of unity—the one permanent thing in our religion, and the only thing we insist upon—is a pure purpose, that purpose being to aid each other in finding the truth that shall make us free. We know that the whole truth is not discovered once for all, but is a continuous revelation that yields itself in continuous measure only to our continuous effort. The Unitarian church is like a stream. Its purpose is as permanent as the force of gravity that makes the stream flow, and without which there could be no stream, but our beliefs, our forms of worship, our modes of expression, our thoughts, and our interpretations must be as mobile and as fluid, to meet the changing needs of life, as is the stream that is ever changing to meet the conditions of the country through which it passes. The stream, however sinuous its course, always flows toward the sea; our changing views and beliefs, if our purposes are pure, will ever flow toward the greater sea of truth that reveals itself in ever increasing measure as we approach it. One of my objects in giving this series of sermons is to show that ever since this society became Unitarian its purpose has been as permanent and as fixed as the force of gravity itself, but that that purpose has found expression through ever changing theological views and beliefs, each peculiar to its own time and to the personality holding it. No one either in pulpit or pew has in the past one hundred years been asked to subscribe to any system of belief or mode of

expression that would in any way hinder him from changing his views whenever additional evidence came to him.

This meetinghouse was dedicated May 23d, 1838, and another period of even greater prosperity for the church than that enjoyed under Dr. Dewey was entered into.

Between the going of Dr. Dewey and the coming of Dr. Peabody was an interregnum of five years. This was the building period. It was hoped that Dr. Dewey would be able to take up his work again after a year's leave of absence in Europe, so his resignation was not accepted until after his return. During his absence the pulpit was supplied by a young man from Boston entirely unknown to the world at that time, by the name of Ralph Waldo Emerson, who made a very favorable impression upon the congregation. Charles Congdon's account of the impression this young man made upon him is familiar to all lovers of Emerson, but will bear repeating once more. He describes his first appearance in the pulpit in the following words:

"One day there came into our pulpit the most gracious of mortals, with a face all benignity, who gave out the first hymn and made the first prayer as an angel might have read and prayed. Our choir was a pretty good one, but its best was coarse and discordant after Emerson's voice. I remember of the sermon only that it had an indefinite charm of simplicity and wisdom, with occasional illustrations from nature which were about the most delicate and dainty things of the kind that I had ever heard. I could understand them, if not the fresh philosophical novelty of the discourse. Mr. Emerson preached for us a good many Sundays, lodging in the house of a Quaker lady just below ours."

The house in which Emerson lodged was the home of Mary Rotch, and is now the church parsonage. Emerson was thus the first minister to occupy the present parsonage, though it was not until sixty years later that it became the property of the church. Mr. Congdon describes a later visit of Emerson's to New Bedford in the following words:

"He gave us afterwards two lectures based upon his travels abroad, and was at a great deal of trouble to hang up prints by way of illustration. There was a picture of the tribune in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, painted by one of our townsmen; and I recall Mr. Emerson's great anxiety that it should have a good light, and his lamentation when a good light was found to be impossible. The lectures themselves were so fine—enchanting, we found them—that I have hungered to see them in print, and have thought of the evenings on which they were delivered as 'true Arabian nights'."

The New Bedford artist who had painted the picture that Emerson was so anxious should be seen in a good light, was undoubtedly William A. Wall.

When Dr. Dewey's resignation was accepted with great regret, the pulpit committee was at once instructed to extend an invitation first to Ralph Waldo Emerson, so favorably had the congregation been impressed by his six months ministry. But Emerson had other plans, and what was New Bedford's loss was undoubtedly the world's gain, for from that time onward, Emerson preached to the world at large through his lectures and through the written page with an effect no one can fully measure.

Then came a two years pastorate by Joseph Angier, who apparently was very satisfactory to the congregation, but who felt in some way that he was a misfit here. The records are quite full at this period and are largely taken up with reports of efforts on the part of the committee to convince Mr. Angier that his services were entirely satisfactory. Mr. Potter speaks of him as "a man of fine talent and great refinement of character, but with a nature almost too sensitively strung for the profession he had chosen." When he could not be persuaded to remain, the parish voted him a gift of five hundred dollars as a token of affection.

The day after the dedication of the new meetinghouse by Dr. Dewey, who came from New York to perform the service, two young men, Ephraim Peabody and John H. Morrison,

were installed as joint ministers of the society, because neither felt himself sufficiently vigorous to carry on the work alone. A good text for this dual ministry would be the words of Paul, "In honor preferring one another," for it was a most happy arrangement, the two working together with the utmost harmony and good will, dividing their labors to the complete satisfaction of all.

Mr. Morrison served the society in collaboration with Dr. Peabody for six years in a most efficient and satisfactory way, but like so many who do their work well he left no record of his life and labor behind him.

Ephraim Peabody was the son of the village blacksmith in the progressive village of Wilton, New Hampshire. As was the case in so many New England families of that time, poverty did not prevent the son from receiving the best available education and he was an apt and lovable pupil in academy, college and university. His early ministry was on the frontier, serving as preacher and tutor at Meadville, Pennsylvania, for a year before the theological school had been established. He then went to the new and struggling church in Cincinnati, Ohio, where he had phenomenal success in making himself loved and his church respected by everyone. It was while here that the seeds were sown of the dread disease that he fought so heroically the remainder of his days and that carried him off at the untimely age of forty-nine. He spent two winters in Mobile, Alabama, in his efforts to gain relief, and gathered together a small congregation of choice spirits that lovingly cherished his memory as long as one of them remained. He was induced to come to New Bedford by the promise of a colleague who should share the burdens of the pastorate with him. After seven years of wonderful service here, he resigned to accept a call to King's Chapel, where he served for ten years, until his death. He was as much beloved and as fully appreciated in Boston as he had been in New Bedford.

His four children who grew to manhood and womanhood all proved themselves worthy of the saintly father and the

capable mother who reared them. Ellen Derby Peabody became the wife of Charles W. Eliot, America's greatest college president; Anna Huidekoper Peabody became the wife of Henry Bellows, one of our leading ministers; Robert Swain Peabody became president of the American Society of Architects; and Francis Greenwood Peabody became Dean of the Harvard Divinity School and an eminent writer on social ethics whose books have been translated into all European languages.

Of the half dozen ministers who served this parish in the nineteenth century long enough to become vitally identified with it, it can hardly be said in truth, I think, that any one of them was held in greater esteem than the others. The bonds that united minister and people were in each case peculiarly strong and lasting. But I should say that Dr. Peabody by an indefinable subtilty of nature called forth a certain tenderness of affection to which none of the others attained to quite the same degree. If you will look at his picture that hangs in the church study, it will help you to appreciate why he was always spoken of as "the beloved pastor" and why that term applied peculiarly to him. The word "saint" stripped of all ecclesiastical suggestiveness is especially appropriate to his personality.

Dr. Peabody passed through no great inner mental struggles or crises in finding his place in the religious world, such as Dr. Dewey experienced. His life was a beautiful and continuous unfoldment; like a human flower responding necessarily to the sunlight of truth and goodness. Born in New England, he inevitably gravitated to the church through which the finest life and highest ideals of the time was finding expression, and one can scarcely imagine his being anything other than a minister of that church. He seems to have been ordained by the very bent of his being to be a preacher of the new glad tidings to the world. In his education he followed the course prepared for him by the pioneers who had gone before him in quest of the higher life. Phillips-Exeter Academy, Bowdoin College, Harvard Divinity School, were the

steps a New Hampshire village boy would almost inevitably take who followed the lure of the new light and life that was spreading over New England with increasing illumination one hundred years ago.

I may be mistaken, but I imagine that if he had been born into an entirely different religious environment, he would hardly have struggled and broken with it, as Dr. Dewey must have done, but would rather have gravitated to the finest the system offered and have made it carry his message of love and good will. If his life had been cast in a Catholic country, I can imagine him becoming a Saint Francis, a center of new life and light, making the most of the church in which he found himself and translating its forms and ordinances into symbols of something transcendently beautiful and true, that would minister to his own life and the life of others. It was not his nature to struggle against conditions so much as to see all that was best in whatever conditions confronted him and make that best dominant. He had that subtle spiritual alchemy in his nature that tended to turn everything he touched into pure gold. Many of his sermons were not so much expositions and arguments as emanations of sweetness and light, of strength and beauty. He was a poet and an artist who could take the elements which in themselves were not at all attractive and combine them in such a way as to give them values before not seen. His son tells of having visited the scenes of his early ministry in Meadville, Cincinnati, and Mobile more than a quarter of a century after his departure, and when he would mention his father's name to those who had known him, their faces would grow radiant with fond memories. Not one of them could recall a single thing he had ever said in any of his sermons, but they had absorbed his message of faith, of hope and of courage and it remained with them. His was a life that bore the fruits of the spirit in abundance, which fruits are love, joy, peace, meekness, temperance, kindness, self-control, and the seeds that he joyfully scattered are bearing abundant fruit to this day.

JOHN WEISS, GENIUS OF THE PULPIT: BRILLIANT, BRAVE, SCHOLARLY, WHIMSICAL.

"Well done, good and faithful servant."

After the departure of Dr. Peabody in 1846, this society was served for eleven years by John Weiss, one of the most gifted men of his time. Less profound and logical than Dr. Dewey, lacking something of the peculiar spiritual quality of Dr. Peabody, less incisive and clear than Mr. Potter, he was more colorful and picturesque than any of them. Mr. Potter speaks of him as the "incomparable preacher, the genius of the pulpit." Dr. Savage says: "Those who liked him, liked him very much indeed. They clung to him, would follow him from place to place, and put themselves out to any extent for the sake of listening to their favorite." I am inclined to think the spell he cast over people was due quite as much to the charm of his personality and the wizardry of his word painting as to his ideas, for his thought was usually somewhat elusive.

The coming of John Weiss marked the transition in this pulpit from the old Unitarian theology to the new. Dr. Dewey and Dr. Peabody would rank among the finest products of early Unitarianism, while Mr. Weiss and Mr. Potter were among the best representatives of the later Unitarian teaching. The difference was one of theological belief rather than of spirit or general attitude toward life, for the spirit of the old school was often as fine as anything in the new, though sometimes cautious to the point of timidity, while the new was frequently daring to the point of recklessness.

The transition in our fellowship from the old school to the new was a long and gradual one but was eventually complete. In 1840, with one or two exceptions, the Unitarian pulpits were all filled by old school ministers. By 1885, the old school ministers had either disappeared or had ceased to be an active force in the fellowship.

Early Unitarianism was not a radical break with the old theology. It was only an attenuation of orthodoxy, a modifying of its harsher Calvinistic doctrines, a humanizing of it in all its applications to life, but it left the old basis of faith almost untouched.

The early Unitarians almost without exception accepted the supernatural as the only adequate basis of religious faith, accepted the miracles of the New Testament as the only evidence of the truthfulness of Christianity, believed the scriptures were a special revelation from God and the only true guide to life and salvation. While they did not accept Jesus as deity in the fullest and completest sense, they regarded him as a supernatural being specially raised up and specially sent to reconcile man to God and through whom alone grace could be found.

The new school was a radical break with the old theology. It rejected the supernatural entirely and expanded the natural to take its place. It asserted that it was through natural law and not through miracle that God's power is manifest in life; miracles were declared to be either exaggerated accounts or misunderstood phenomena of natural law. The scriptures of the Old and New Testament were regarded as human documents, some of them of surpassing worth, records of man's searchings for the infinite, and not records of the infinite reaching down to man in special ways. Jesus, they maintained, was purely human, a great prophet and seer, whose teachings and example are of incomparable religious value, but within the range of possible human attainment.

This was something distinctly radical. The great preacher of the new doctrine, who greatly surpassed all others of both schools in energy and power, was Theodore Parker. It is doubtful if any man ever threw such a fright into the ranks of organized religion, orthodox and liberal alike, as did Theodore Parker when he began to thunder the new doctrines from the Melodion in Boston. All were frightened, but the old school Unitarians were in the most untenable position. They were between the devil and the deep sea, as it were,—

between the orthodox on one hand and Parker on the other, and were equally afraid of both. The orthodox, while terribly shocked by Parker, could not resist the splendid opportunity to heckle the Unitarians by saying to them, "We told you so." And it was true. They had been telling the Unitarians from the start, that if once they allowed themselves to begin pruning the old theology, cutting away this branch and that as they were doing, it would only be a matter of time until they would be uprooting the whole plant of Christianity. The Unitarians had replied that nothing of the kind could happen, they were only pruning away the dead wood and were better Christians than those interpreting Christianity in the old supernatural sense. And now the worst predictions of the orthodox were being realized! Here was their greatest preacher digging up the supernatural, root and branch, with a vigor and a success that had never been surpassed.

But Parker was not a mere iconoclast by any means. He was busy planting, watering and tending the new growth that had in it far greater promise than anything he was destroying; for the natural and the human realm as expanded, enriched and interpreted by Parker and Emerson, furnished infinitely greater possibilities for the more abundant life than did the supernatural that was being overthrown.

When John Weiss came to this pulpit in 1847, a young man twenty-nine years of age, in enthusiastic sympathy with Parker and Emerson and his whole being vibrant with the new gospel which he poured forth in a flood of literary, scientific and classical erudition, and with a brilliance of figurative and epigrammatic expression that was overwhelming, I have sometimes wondered if he did not dazzle the people and carry them along by his impetuosity quite as much as by convincing them.

It was during the pastorate of Mr. Weiss that the church as a separate organization disappeared. We need to distinguish between the church and society. The society consisted of the pewholders and all those who gave their support to the organization. The church was a small group within the society, con-

sisting of those who had made a profession of faith by subscribing to a creed or a definite statement of religious belief. When the division came in 1810, it was found that a majority of the church, or inner circle, were Calvinistic, while a majority of the society, or larger organization, were liberal. Before the division, the church, or inner circle, claimed the right to choose the minister, on the ground that he was primarily a teacher and preacher of religion, and hence his selection should be left to those who had made a definite religious profession. The society denied the church this right, on the ground that all those who helped maintain the organization should have an equal voice in the selection of the minister, whether they had ever made any religious professions or not. It was then that a majority of those constituting the church withdrew and formed the North Congregational Church. That left this society almost without a church, as only five of the church members remained with the society. It was debated at some length as to whether the church should be continued. Some of them felt that they must have a church, so the remaining five serving as a nucleus invited others to join them and they formulated a new covenant of faith. We thus have the anomalous condition of the old church withdrawing from the old society and building up a new society about itself, and the old society building up a new church within itself. This new church covenant is long and rather involved in its statements. As one reads it over today, he instinctively wonders what the quarrel had all been about, for at first sight this statement would seem to be orthodox enough for anyone. But when one examines it more closely, he discovers that all the harsher doctrines of Calvinism are eliminated. It says nothing of blood atonement, of predestination, of total depravity, of the trinity, of infant damnation, or of eternal punishment, though some of these doctrines might seem to be implied. It was simply an expurgated edition of the old theology. This was adopted in 1811, just as Unitarianism was beginning to differentiate itself from the common body of Congregationalism in New England.

Immediately after the arrival of Dr. Dewey (1824), this profession of faith was modified and simplified. It still seems to us to be a pretty stiff theological proposition for anyone calling himself a Unitarian to accept. It contains these words:

"Acknowledging your offenses, you profess repentance toward God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. You receive Jesus Christ as the Son of God; as your Teacher, Example, and Lord; as your Saviour clothed with authority and power to sustain this great office and work. You believe that he died for our sins; that he rose from the dead, and is now seated at the right hand of God, where he evermore liveth to make intercession for us; and it is your solemn purpose to obey and follow him, and your joyful hope that you may be brought by him to eternal happiness in the love and favor of God." I presume there are few here this morning who would care to subscribe to this covenant, without a good many mental reservations to say the least.

However, it was made perfectly clear at this time that no one's rights or privileges in the society should be in any way abridged by his failure to accept this profession of faith, and furthermore, it was enacted "that this church regards the Lord's Supper, as an ordinance free and open, without any hindrance or shackles; that the partaking of this ordinance is freely left to the conscience of all, and that no man or body of men is appointed by the Lord of conscience to stand between them and this holy rite, either by vote or human creed, as being authority on this matter; and it is therefore the duty of the officers of the church to administer the sacrament to all such as profess a serious and conscientious desire to partake of it."

This organization thus became what could be called a free church one hundred years ago. They had a creed for those who wished it, they had the communion service for those who wished it, but whether one subscribed to the creed or joined in the communion service, all were equal within the society.

In 1842, under the pastorate of the saintly Peabody, the covenant was again revised and simplified. While Dr. Peabody was distinctly "old school" in his theology he was as broad and liberal in spirit as the air we breathe. He would be the last person to try to impose his theological views upon anyone, and the church covenant was reduced to its lowest terms, as follows: "Feeling the importance of a Christian life, and entertaining the solemn purpose to follow Jesus and to yield obedience to whatever of Christian truth may be made known to you, it is your wish to unite with this Christian church. In the presence of God, you profess a true and earnest desire to walk in all his commandments and ordinances blameless." That was a covenant that almost anyone could subscribe to: and because almost anyone could, almost no one did: that is, because the church had no distinct function of its own, apart from the society, it was forgotten and neglected. After the coming of Mr. Weiss, there is no record of any meeting of the church. It was not abolished, it simply ceased to function and faded away. Thus for more than seventy years, this has been simply a society, open to all who cared to help maintain it.

As there were men before Agamemnon, so there were teachers of the new school before Parker, and the greatest of these was Emerson. But Emerson was a gentle soul: while no one was more fearless, he was not militant or aggressive in spirit or in method. Some one has said that Emerson "takes down our idols so tenderly that it seems an act of worship." But Parker was of a different type. What Emerson "sang so sweetly in the willing ears that were attuned to such elusive melody, Parker proclaimed as from the housetops, and as with a trumpet's voice." While it is doubtless true that "Emerson's exquisite chant" will live in literature long after Parker has been forgotten, it was the latter's trumpet blast that brought down the walls of Jericho,—that precipitated the impending conflict with a crash.

Emerson had been a great inspiration to Parker. He had hailed his little book on nature as a new gospel, and when he

listened to Emerson's Divinity School address in 1838, he walked home electrified by a new purpose and before he went to bed had outlined the course that he pursued with such energy and effect till the day of his death. He brought Emerson's message down from the skies and turned it into a thunderbolt that shook the temple to its foundations.

Going back a few years, Emerson had accepted a call to the Second Church in Boston shortly after graduating from the Harvard Theological School in 1830. After serving that church most acceptably for three years, he withdrew from the church because he did not feel that he could conscientiously administer the communion service, and because other forms of the service had become repellent and meaningless to him. It was shortly after his resignation in Boston that he filled this pulpit so satisfactorily and was given an enthusiastic call to become the permanent minister of the society. If he had seen fit to accept that call, then this pulpit would have been the one from which the new school theology would have been first clearly proclaimed, instead of from Parker's pulpit in Boston as it was a few years later.

It is doubtful if there was another congregation in New England so well prepared to receive Emerson's message as this one was at that time, because of the large influx of liberal Friends that came into it during Dr. Dewey's ten years ministry bringing so much of their free spirit with them. The transcendentalism that Emerson was proclaiming was intellectualized Quakerism, pure and simple. Emerson declared that man's intuitions of truth and right that he gathers from his accumulated experiences are his highest and truest authority, and must supersede scripture, creed, church, ordinances, relevation and all other external authorities.

That was exactly the Quaker doctrine of the inner light for which they had suffered so much. Emerson now rejected the ordinance of the Lord's Supper for precisely the same reason that the Friends had rejected it, and all other ordinances, a century and a half before,—because religion was so entirely

a matter of the inner life that any set form of external expression seemed like idolatry. The Quaker element in this society at least, must have been willing to accept Emerson on his own terms and would have been glad to have given him a free hand to dispense with the communion service, or to simplify that or any of the other forms or expressions as he saw fit. I imagine it must have been as difficult for many of the Friends who came into the society under Dr. Dewey to accept these forms to which they were not accustomed, as it would have been for some of those already in the society and who had always been accustomed to them to have given them up.

Since Emerson did not come, the preaching of the new school theology here was delayed for a decade and a half, but the essence of all that was finest and best in both the old and the new pervaded every utterance of Dr. Peabody's and since his influence was so beneficent and beautiful in every way we would not have it otherwise.

It was for the gifted John Weiss, saturated through and through with both Emerson and Parker, but thoroughly original with it all, to be the first preacher of the new Unitarianism from this pulpit. He poured it forth in such a flood of epigrammatic and picturesque language, and with such a wealth of allusion and illustration, and punctuated often by so much wit and irony, that I am somewhat doubtful if many of those who sat enraptured at his feet ever really knew what his theology was or was not. They got something that helped them and that made them hungry for more, and that was enough.

He seemed to center everything around the idea of God and the Immortal Life. The more I read his books, the more I am charmed, thrilled, delighted and edified, but the more completely I am at sea as to what were his ideas of God and what was his view of the Immortal Life. I like him all the better for that, for I am decidedly chary of the man who undertakes to reduce any of the great ultimate questions to definite terms. How absolutely helpless we are when we try

to define or to explain in any way the simplest living thing that crawls at our feet. What presumption then to assume to be able to reduce to any adequate definition the Divine Life and the Immortal Life!

John Weiss was to the manor born, being a native of Boston. He graduated from Harvard College in 1837, and from the Harvard Divinity School in 1843. He served the church at Watertown four years, this church for eleven years, and then after an interval of four years returned to the church at Watertown and remained seven years. He was not only a preacher, but was a translator, a lecturer, an essayist, a biographer, a literary critic and interpreter, a reader, a commentator, a conversationalist and a wit. In the radical club of Boston, consisting at that time of many of the brightest minds in America, his scintillating conversation, his brilliant wit and his ever ready repartee made him a star of the first magnitude never to be forgotten by those who were privileged to be associated with him.

He was a profound German scholar and an interpreter of German literature. One of his first literary efforts was translating and editing a German romance written in verse. He also edited and translated some of Schiller's and Ficht's essays and letters and philosophical works. His monumental work was "The Life and Correspondence of Theodore Parker," in two volumes. He published a volume on "The Wit and Humor of Shakespeare," a volume on "American Religion" and one on "The Immortal Life," besides numerous articles in *The Christian Examiner,* the *Atlantic Monthly,* the *Dial,* the *Radical,* and other publications.

He possessed more of that indefinable quality we call genius than any of the other men in our course. He had also some of the limitations that are apt to accompany genius. He was critical, sometimes captious, and on rare occasions bitingly bitter. He felt the sting of stupid opposition and sometimes flashed back a rapier stroke that was deadly in its thrust.

He treats the deepest and most sacred subjects with a freedom, a cleverness, a wit, and an irony that sometimes caused people to question his seriousness, but there was not the slightest doubt of his wholehearted earnestness and sincerity. He was quick to catch the substance of any new movement and to throw it upon the screen in vivid colors. He combined an equal love for the mystical and the scientific, and in many of his writings seems to be flashing back and forth from one field to the other in a way that is very elusive.

He seldom treats a subject in what would be called a logical way, but rather throws a multitude of flash lights upon it, and leaves us to work it out for ourselves if we wish. If he saw things in sequence he seldom presents them to us in that way, but gives us vivid glimpses of the whole field of life in a way that fascinates, but leaves us in some uncertainty as to what is real and what is fancy.

Lest you may think I have overstated his gifts of expression, let me read a short quotation found in the old files of *"The Radical"* for 1871. This was taken from *"The Morning Star"* which in a critical and rather unfriendly review of Mr. Weiss' book "The American Religion" which had just been published, concludes with these words, "It must be confessed that he has a keen and critical mind, real force of thought, and writes in a style that is unique and effective. Now he is as pithy and aphoristic as Emerson, now as ruggedly robust as Carlyle, now as inclusive and pungent as Parker, now as rhythmical as Julia Ward Howe at her best, now as magnetic as Starr King, and now as polished as George William Curtis. But he is John Weiss through it all."

Our verdict must be that here was a man who served his day and generation remarkably well. He always rang true. He was a marvelous awakener of the inner life. He stimulated people and aroused in them an intense interest in the higher life, and we must say of him, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

WILLIAM J. POTTER—A REVERENT RADICAL.

Sixty-four years ago the twenty-eighth of this month, (December, 1923), William J. Potter was ordained and installed minister of this society. Just thirty years ago the seventeenth of this month, he stood in this pulpit for the last time, having served the society with a fidelity seldom matched for a period of thirty-four years, lacking a few days.

I approach my subject today with not a little trepidation. Mr. Potter personally ministered to the older half of this congregation, during the most plastic and responsive years of your lives. Those early impressions have now been hallowed by more than thirty years of tender, sanctifying memories. Instead of fading they have been deepened and made more ineradicable by passing time.

For a total stranger to step in and attempt to interpret this man to his own people, seems not only like an intrusion but an impertinence. But there is sometimes a value in our seeing ourselves as those see us whose experiences and associations have been entirely different from our own. That is the only value my discourse can have for the older members of the congregation. It can add nothing to your knowledge and understanding and appreciation of the beloved pastor who is still a vital influence in your lives.

But, "a generation has arisen that knew not Joseph." Possibly I can do something for them. If I can so vitalize the past that they may be inspired to lean forward in life with greater zeal and faith, then it will be well worth while. If there was one thing that characterized Mr. Potter, over and above all other things, it was his prophetic spirit,—the faith and hope and courage with which he projected himself into the future. He had a keen appreciation of the past, he served his present with conscientious fidelity and devotion, but he really lived in the future; not the immediate future either, but the distant future that most of us have scarcely yet glimpsed.

That is one reason some people found it hard to follow him; he was so far ahead of his time.

We could scarcely find four men who varied more in personal and temperamental traits than the four past ministers of this church that we are considering in this course. Yet, if these four could come together, I feel sure that each would be exceedingly appreciative of the others, for underneath all their marked differences was the same spirit,—the passion for truth, honesty and service. Dr. Dewey was marked by a logical profundity of thought, coupled to a vital and commanding personality that would gain recognition and give him power wherever he should go. Dr. Peabody's tender beauty of character, enriched by what we may call his "spiritual-mindedness," gave him as commanding a place as Dr. Dewey enjoyed. Mr. Weiss was a man of genius; a man of marvelous gifts who seemed to have all the resources of the age at his finger ends.

If you should search the world over, it would be difficult to find a man more unlike Mr. Weiss than Mr. Potter, in personality, temperament and in all his processes of thinking and expression. And yet they were of the same school; they were both radical and they almost invariably came to the same conclusions on all matters of vital importance. Mr. Weiss clothed his thought in such profusion of language that it was seldom clear. Mr. Potter spoke the naked truth. There was no misunderstanding his meaning.

Compared to the other three, it would seem at first sight as though Mr. Potter was handicapped by limitations that would put him out of their class as a preacher or as a man of direct influence. He was not an impressive personality; all the others were. He had little personal magnetism, which is supposed to be one of every public speaker's chief assets. He had few social gifts which go far toward making men popular, enabling them to mix readily with people and exchange views on easy terms. He was shy and retiring, though those who knew him knew that courage was one of his cardinal virtues. While he was very earnest, he carried with him little

of the contagion of enthusiasm. He had few, if any, of the arts or tricks of the orator to make up for these deficiencies. He lacked what we should call the contagious buoyancy of youthfulness. The extracts from his journal in his younger days are marked by a dead seriousness and a conspicuous maturity of thought and understanding. It is difficult to imagine Mr. Potter ever being a boy, while it is easy to imagine Mr. Weiss a "rip terror" of a boy who never quite outgrew his jocund boyishness. His writings indicate a lack of the sense of humor, which when not overdone is a great resource to a public man, often saving him from many an otherwise serious jolt. He always appealed to the thought and the reason; seldom to the emotions, save indirectly. He was a man of deep sentiment but always kept his feelings in complete subjection to his thought and never wished to arouse the feelings of others save as an accompaniment of their thinking. His sermons are all on a high, somewhat monotonous intellectual level, broken by few concrete illustrations. This does not tend to make one popular; it is too hard work; it is asking too much of the average mind. Scores of people will respond to an emotional appeal or to a concrete presentation for one who will respond to pure reason.

And yet, Mr. Potter seems to have gripped the community and to have been as great a power as the others. In the realm of pure thought, Mr. Potter was superior to any of them. He had a keenness of intellect that would penetrate unerringly to the root of a subject and then follow it through unhesitatingly, regardless of the conclusions to which it led. He did not tie himself up at the beginning to some assumption, so that his reasoning and his investigations would be sure to bring him out where he wished to go, as most of us unconsciously do. He launched forth onto the unknown sea of life, trusting that the compass of his best understanding would bring him up somewhere, and was willing to take up his mental abode, for the time at least, on whatever shore of apparent truth it brought him to, whether it was hospitable and attractive or not. His moral fibre was as true as his intellect. He did not

hesitate to accept the full consequences of any conclusions at which he had deliberately arrived; he never tried to shift his responsibilities to other shoulders. In addition to these strong qualities, he had a profound and gracious respect for those who honestly held different views. While he never swerved from his convictions, he was always ready to uncomplainingly accept any necessary sacrifice for conviction's sake.

These qualities that gave Mr. Potter his strength and his influence are not popular ones, and had he not had a following of men and women of unusual capacity to appreciate such qualities, and who were willing and glad to uphold his hands whether they always agreed with him or not, he could not have become the power he was in the community. His appreciation of the loyalty of his congregation was most profound; no one knew better than he that the demands he made were not easy to comply with; he often felt that it was asking more than he really had any right to ask, that his congregation should cut loose from all moorings and sail with him out onto the unchartered sea of religious investigation.

I should say that Mr. Potter dwelt more continually alone than any other minister you have ever had; not primarily because he was so shy and retiring, but because all his thought processes carried him far afield; he was forever breaking new ground; was out on the frontiers of religious thought testing the soil from which he himself could scarcely hope to reap much; if harvest there was to be, it would be garnered by those he could never know.

There are several episodes in Mr. Potter's life that I believe justify the conclusions I have drawn. The one really dramatic event in his life was his response to the draft in 1863. That revealed early in his ministerial career the real metal of the man. It seems to be so easy for others to extol the soldierly qualities and so difficult for me to do so that I pass over this interesting chapter in his career. Everyone who knows anything about him fully appreciates this demonstration of his moral fibre, but there were other episodes in his

life having no dramatic element in them, that passed by unobserved, that probably tried his soul more severely than did his military experiences.

Mr. Potter's youth was spent when the full flush of the Transcendental movement was spreading over the land, and which brought thrills of hope to some and consternation to others. With this new interpretation of life Mr. Potter was in completest agreement. But before he had time to find himself in his chosen field, a great new force precipitated itself into the thought world, which brought still greater consternation to the timid and tended to sober the daring. Darwin's "Origin of Species" was published the year Mr. Potter was settled here, and Herbert Spencer's "Doctrine of Evolution" soon stepped into the center of the stage in the thought world and held its place for a full generation. Evolution was right in line with the transcendental thought that had preceded it, but it brought such a wealth of new material into the field for people to think about that it at first embarrassed as many as it helped.

The evolutionary thought was just the explanation that the radicals in religion were waiting for, but it took many of them some time to adjust themselves to it. Already they had rejected the supernatural, and were busy showing how the natural world was a much truer and greater field for God's revelations of truth to man than the supernatural had ever been conceived of as being, when the thought of evolution came in to enrich it immeasurably. As was inevitable, many at first lost themselves in the maze of new material that was offered them.

No sooner was the grand discovery announced that nature is divine, that the natural world is the medium of God's revelations to man, than many at once jumped to the conclusion that nature must be perfect, that all man need do is to study and understand nature, imitate her, obey her laws and the millennium will be at hand. Brook Farm and similar movements sprang into being in which the elect tried to rest

their weary heads upon the bountiful breast of mother nature, have all their wants thus supplied and be at peace forever more.

Man had to be disillusioned and made to see that this new revelation was not a mere substitute for the old; that the natural world however well understood is not a revelation of a perfect and finished heaven that man can enter, much as he was thought of as entering the old supernatural heaven; that evolution is not a sort of natural express train that man can step aboard and be carried forward to perfection.

No, the new revelation reveals to man an imperfect and uncompleted plan, and calls upon man to make himself a God by taking up the creative work contemplated in these incomplete plans that are revealed to him by his understanding of life and of nature, correcting the plans as he goes on in accordance with those ideals that ever project themselves in advance of true achievement. It tells him that there is not a perfect thing in nature or in life; that he is called upon to correct and redirect nature and life in the way it should go. It tells him that the available God is the potency that suffuses all life, which he must make more real and more available by his creative achievements.

To me, the most remarkable thing about Mr. Potter is the fact that he accepted from the start all the implications of these strange and then startling doctrines, more than sixty years ago, did not wait for others to blaze the trail that he might follow safely in their footsteps, but went forth fearlessly, though carefully, to draw the religious lessons from the perplexing confusion of life's interpretations that had been so unexpectedly dumped into the religious world, and never once lost his bearings or got beyond his depths, but drew the safe and sane lesson for daily conduct and made that part of his message at least so clear that a wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein.

The withdrawal of this society from all affiliations with any of the common Unitarian organizations, and Mr. Potter's devotion to the Free Religious Association forms an impor-

tant chapter that can only be understood in the light of the general Unitarian movement. The twenty-five years from 1820 to 1845 was the period in which the old school Unitarian churches were becoming differentiated from the orthodox churches. By the close of that period about two hundred churches, mostly in Massachusetts, had become definitely Unitarian and had accepted the name. Then came the preaching of radical Unitarianism under the leadership of Theodore Parker and about a dozen ministers that were in harmony with him. This seemed to rather stun the entire movement to such an extent that for the next twenty years, from 1845 to 1865, it was at a standstill. Then came a quarter of a century of growth, from 1865 to 1890, when the number of churches doubled. This period of growth was also the period in which Unitarianism passed over, almost completely, from the old school to the new school interpretation. Those old school Unitarians have always aroused my unbounded admiration for the fine spirit that they collectively showed toward the radicals, notwithstanding the fact that they were so badly frightened by the new teachings. They always refused to adopt any creed or covenant that would drive out the radicals in spite of the fact that the controversy between the two factions was often very bitter.

In 1865 when the National Conference was being organized, a number of creeds or covenants were proposed. Mr. A. A. Low, the father of Seth Low and at that time one of the most influential men in New York, proposed this one: "Unitarians believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ; the Son of God and his specially appointed messenger and representative to our race; gifted with supernatural power, approved of God by miracles and signs and wonders which God did by him, and thus by divine authority commanding the devout and reverential faith of all who claim the Christian name." Dr. Henry Bellows, who called the conference and who was the acknowledged leader of it for many years, stated his belief as follows: "Unitarians of the school to which I belong accept Jesus Christ with all their hearts as the Sent of God, the

divinely inspired Son of the Father, who by his miraculously proven office and his sinless life and character was fitted to be and was made revealer of the universal and permanent religion of the human race." These proposed creeds no doubt represented the beliefs of a large majority of those present, but they refused to adopt any of them because they did not want to drive out or coerce the radical minority.

But there was one thing the conservatives did stick for and that was the word "Christian" and they called the organization "The National Conference of Unitarian and other Christian Churches." The radicals would have been content to have had it "other religious bodies," but the conservatives would not yield on that point. That little word "Christian" divided our Unitarian ministry for nearly a generation, although it was specifically stated that no attempt should be made to define "Christian," each being left free to define it in his own way. To divide on such a point as that certainly seems like tithing mint, anise and cummin and neglecting the weightier matters of life, but it doubtless represented what was in reality an almost insuperable difference that was in the minds and attitudes of many. On the way home to Boston from Syracuse, where the conference was held, a number of the radicals got their heads together on the train, and the result was the formation some months later of the Free Religious Association, with Mr. Potter as secretary.

I may be wrong, but the history of the Free Religious Association and one or two similar organizations seem to me to be one of the rather melancholy chapters in our Unitarian history. It furnished a platform from which was delivered many of the ablest addresses of the generation, it furnished a periodical that was remarkable for the number of advanced ideas that found expression through it; but on the whole it has always seemed to me that it simply drew off into an eddy a number of the most brilliant minds of the time. It was a good deal of a mutual admiration society in which a number of exceptional people came together and spent much

time in thanking God that they were not as other people are, especially the other poor benighted Unitarians who were content to plod along the old road.

I always find myself in sympathy with the radical thinkers. By radical, I do not mean the mere militant revolutionist to whom the term is usually applied, but the man who goes to the root of the question and honestly thinks himself out of the present order of thought into what he believes to be a truer one. I seldom see a truly radical religious statement that does not make me wish I had the mental capacity and the concentration to carry it one step farther. Yet sympathetic as I always am with radical thought, I often find myself out of sympathy with radicals, because they so frequently seem to me to be bumptious and intolerant toward all proposed lines of action, and waste their efforts in fruitless criticism.

Mr. Potter was for thirteen years secretary of the Free Religious Association, and then was president of it for the rest of his life. He, to a greater extent than any other person, was the backbone of that organization. He was the one who did the drudgery, looked after the details, slaved for it, fairly gave his life to it because to him it was the embodiment of a splendid ideal. Looking at it from out of my ignorance at this distance, it seems as though its chief accomplishment was in furnishing a platform upon which a few brilliant but rather cantankerous men might shine at his expense.

Much in the life of Mr. Potter can be best understood by realizing that there was in his mind a growing unwillingness to take the name "Christian." Christianity had always been defined by both Protestants and Catholics in sacramental and exclusive terms, and he felt that it was time, in the light of the better understanding of life that the nineteenth century was developing, to aim at something more universal and inclusive than any form of expression that organized Christianity had yet taken. This conviction had taken such definite hold on him in his student days that he accepted the pastorate here

on condition that "some modification be made in the communion service that shall render it less a sacrament and more distinctly a commemorative service." In accordance with this desire the communion service was held entirely distinct and apart from any other service; anyone, whether member of the society or not, was free to attend and participate in it, and no slightest reflection was cast upon any member of the society for absenting himself from the service or for attending and refraining from partaking of the elements of bread and wine. The memory and example of Jesus as a pre-eminent but purely human teacher of religion was the one thing that was stressed at this service. In 1867, after serving the society seven years he announced at one of the services that he could no longer conscientiously administer the communion service in any form and declared his entire willingness to resign his position. He apparently fully expected that his withdrawal from the ministry would be the outcome. He explained at some length the two reasons why he could no longer administer the rite. The physical elements, the bread and the wine, were so completely associated with the sacramental idea that they were increasingly obnoxious to him. Instead of arousing reverential and devotional feelings they were depressing and repellent. He could see no vital connection between the bread and wine and the memorial element. In the second place, he could see no reason why Jesus should be selected as the one and only personality from among the great host of religious teachers and human benefactors to be always honored by a special service and a special formula. At the same time, he expressed his willingness to hold a memorial service once a year without the material elements or anything suggesting them, in which all great religious teachers, prophets and benefactors should be called to remembrance,—a sort of rationalized all saints day such as they have in the Catholic churches once a year. To Mr. Potter's surprise, the meeting voted unanimously to place the matter entirely in his hands to arrange for such services as met with his approval. General memorial services, such as he had suggested, were held for a number of years but gradually fell into disuse. Although

no one voted against this change, one or two prominent men in the society felt that the communion service was vital to their faith, and, although they respected Mr. Potter's convictions, sorrowfully withdrew from the society. Mr. Potter equally respected and honored them for being true to their convictions and saw them depart with a heavy heart. On the other hand, a number of devout women whom he had supposed would be the ones who would cling most tenaciously to the service, expressed their great relief at having it discontinued, saying that they had always tried very hard to get something out of the service, some mystic sentiment, but had never succeeded.

We can see clearly that this was a part of Mr. Potter's prophetic striving for universal religion. He felt that a universal religious sentiment could not be built up so long as any one individual was given a place of special exaltation above others. He saw how all systems of ecclesiastical authority had been built up in just that way; first the exaltation of an individual, then his deification and finally the attempt to compel all to bow down before him and the system that had grown up around him.

There has never been any uniformity among Unitarians regarding the communion service. Many churches have it and many do not. During the latter third of the nineteenth century, the tendency was strongly away from it,—to either dispense with it entirely or to relegate it to a very unimportant place. Almost without exception, the churches founded in the West during that period have never had the communion service. During the past twenty years, the drift has been in the other direction,—toward making more of the communion service as a part of a decided movement for the enrichment of our services. Many maintain that the conditions which impelled Mr. Potter and others in his day to dispense with the communion service do not obtain today. They maintain that we have now become so completely divorced from the sacramental conception of religion that a communion service need not even suggest it, and that such a service properly presented

may be a very helpful and effective memorial service, deepening and intensifying our appreciation of the spirit of self-sacrifice and of love as the redeeming element in all life.

The dropping of Mr. Potter's name from the list of Unitarian ministers in the Year Book, and the withdrawal of this society from all affiliation with Unitarian bodies or agencies, was due to this same craving and striving on the part of Mr. Potter for universal religion.

In the year 1872, the controversy between the radical and conservative elements in the Unitarian body was at its height, and that year the editor of the *Christian Register,* entirely on his own responsibility and not as the representative or spokesman of any body or organization, criticized severely the attitude of the Free Religious Association, and virtually invited the radicals that constituted it to withdraw from the Unitarian body which he thought they no longer truly represented. Several of them, including Rev. O. B. Frothingham, the president of the Free Religious Association, at once withdrew their names from the Unitarian Year Book. A little later the editor of the Year Book wrote to Mr. Potter, who was secretary of the Free Religious Association, calling his attention to what Mr. Frothingham and others had done and asking him if he wished his name retained in the Year Book. Mr. Potter replied that he would not ask to have his name removed, but that he did not call himself a Unitarian Christian. For that reason, and because the National Conference had voted to retain the name "Christian," Mr. Potter's name was dropped from the list of ministers. Mr. Potter wrote a letter mildly protesting against the action of the Association, to which a reply was made that the list of ministers and churches in the Year Book was compiled solely for the convenience of the denomination, and, in including or excluding anyone's name from the Year Book, the Association assumed no responsibility for his religious standing, but simply did the best it could to register the sentiment and wishes of the general body. Nevertheless, the dropping of Mr. Potter's name from the list of ministers was taken very seriously

not only here in New Bedford but elsewhere. This society at once withdrew from all affiliations with the Unitarian agencies. For a time Mr. Potter's attitude and the action of this society constituted one of the storm centers of controversy in the denomination. Mr. Potter's name was restored to the list of ministers in 1884, after having been omitted for twelve successive years. This society remained unaffiliated until after the death of Mr. Potter in 1893, although the National Conference, at the very next session after Mr. Potter's name had been dropped, passed without a dissenting vote a resolution that was offered by Dr. Bellows, the president of the conference, specifically inviting the New Bedford society to send delegates to the next conference and thus renew its affiliations. This society's name was never omitted from the list of churches published in the Year Book, in spite of its withdrawal from all affiliations.

Mr. Potter was a careful and enthusiastic student of comparative religion. He saw that the more the various world religions developed themselves ethically, the more they tended to coalesce and forget all their differences,—the more inclusive they became. He saw just as clearly that the more elaborately they developed their sacramental and theological views, and the more they emphasized the importance of these, the more they drew apart; the more exclusive and intolerant they became, the readier they were to fight and destroy each other.

He saw that the two great world religions that were most alike were the Christian and Mohammedan, and yet that no two had quarrelled so much or tried so hard to annihilate each other; and he saw that the things they quarrelled over were not their ethical teachings but their sacramental habits and practices. Each taught, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," but they never quarrelled over that; whenever that thought really took possession of them and was uppermost in their minds, they were the best of friends. Each said, "Do good for evil," and they never quarrelled over that. Each said in substance, "What doth the Lord thy God require of thee but to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with

thy God?" They never quarrelled about that, and whenever they could concentrate on such teachings, they were always ready to lend a helping hand to each other.

But their sacramental beliefs, although very similar, were the cause of bitterness and deadly strife for centuries. Each said there was one specially chosen personality, through whom God had made known his will to man, but one said that specially chosen personality was Jesus and the other said it was Mohammed. And so they fought each other for a thousand years. They both said God had made his truth known through a specially dictated or prepared book. One declared that book was the Koran, the other insisted it was the Bible, and that lent bitterness and fury to the conflict. Both believed in the saving power of sacraments. One pointed to the Christian usages and said, "These are the sacraments ordained of God and through them alone can man obtain grace." The other pointed to the Mohammedan usages and formulas and declared them to be the sacrament through which God functions in life; and that whetted their antagonism to a still sharper edge.

Mr. Potter saw the same thing within the divisions of Christianity. We do not have an Episcopal church on one corner, a Baptist church on another, a Methodist church on another, a Catholic church on another and a Unitarian church on another because of a difference in their ethical beliefs. We do not recognize such a thing as an Episcopal code of morals, a Presbyterian code and a Unitarian code. They all agree that the fruits of the spirit, which are love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control are better than the works of the flesh, which are enmities, strifes, jealousies, wraths, factions, divisions, envyings, drunkenness, revellings and such like. They have not divided because one group says it is better to love one another and the other says it is better to hate one another, or because one says it is better to be kind and the other says it is better to be cruel, or because one says it is better to exercise self-control while another says, just follow your impulses and let yourselves go. True we do not

live up to these standards and get into trouble for that reason, but we are all in sufficient agreement as to what we ought to strive for in matters of conduct, to all be in one church, instead of having the fifty-seven varieties that we do have. It is not the differences in our ethical ideals and aspirations that keep us apart.

Why then do we have the different varieties? Because we cannot agree on our sacramental practices and our theological and speculative beliefs. One group of churches says there are seven sacraments, equally necessary; another group says there are only two. One says, there is just one established channel through which God can function in terms of grace, and that is the church He established, our church; all others are spurious. One says he only who has received ordination through the unbroken line of apostolic succession is a true clergyman and whoever else assumes such functions is a usurper and evil must eventually come from it. One says only they who are wedded by a truly ordained clergyman are really married, and evil will sometime overtake all others and their offspring. Some say the sacraments must be received kneeling, others say sitting, and some say either or neither. Some say you must receive the communion in two kinds, others in one only. Some say a child should be baptized as soon as born, others say no one should be baptized until he has reached the age of accountability. Some say he only is truly baptized who has been immersed, others say sprinkling is as efficacious. Some say there is only one holy day, the seventh in the week, and whoever desecrates it cannot be held blameless.

Mr. Potter said in substance, I select those ethical principles that I see working in and through all religions and outside of all religions and which I believe to be the only effective saving virtue in any of them, and I make those ethical principles my religion; I relegate all theological and speculative beliefs to a secondary place, and when I do that I have ceased to be Christian, Brahman, Mohammedan or Jew; I have embraced the universal religious principle that is work-

ing everywhere in life, inside all religious systems and outside all religious systems, and I do not want to wear the labels of any, because each of them places some particular sacramental or theological belief first, which I refuse to do.

That, as near as I can interpret it, is the reason Mr. Potter discontinued the communion service, why his name was dropped from the list of Christian ministers as listed in the Unitarian Year Book, and why this society withdrew from all affiliations and remained in isolation for over twenty years. Mr. Potter saw clearly that church union on any other basis than that of putting the ethical life first meant tyranny and reaction, while union on that basis might mean liberty, for that was the natural basis of union in all developing life.

In some ways it seems most unfortunate that he should have died at the age of sixty-four when there were so many things he wished to do. In other ways it seems fitting that the end should have come when it did. He had returned a short time before from the seventeen-day session of the World's Parliament of Religion in Chicago. That was the completest and fullest expression there has ever been of all that Mr. Potter had worked for and dreamed of. He felt that this Parliament was the beginning of a great movement. That such meetings would be held frequently thereafter all over the world and that their influence would permeate the whole religious life of the land; that a new era in religious life was being slowly but surely ushered in, and he was making his plans to devote the remainder of his life to it.

But the Parliament of Religions had the reverse effect from that anticipated by Mr. Potter. It frightened the conservatives to see all the sects of Christendom and the representatives of all the so-called heathen religions of the world meet together on equal terms, fraternizing together as brothers. It looked as if it meant the undermining of Christianity as the one and only religion ordained of God to which every knee must bow, and they drew back and there has been a decided reaction rather than a decided advance in the direction Mr.

Potter anticipated, and if he had lived I am afraid disappointment rather than triumph would have been the part of his latter days, though he would have met it with that same, sweet, heroic serenity with which he met all the experiences of life. Looked at from this distance, it seems fitting that he should have passed on in the full flush of the sense of triumph that attended his last days.

No man ever had finer dreams than he; no one ever worked more persistently or heroically, without bitterness or malice, to make those dreams come true. Whether the realization of his dreams are delayed one century, or ten centuries, they are nearer true today because this patient, prophetic man labored in your midst, and perhaps there was no other society that under all the circumstances would have upheld his hands as loyally as did this one, and it must share with him all that was triumphant in his life.

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